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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001516

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS  
NSC FOR DORMANDY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: MALDIVES: EU DELEGATION DENIED ACCESS TO  
PRESIDENT, PRISONERS

REF: A. STATE 191997

[B](#). COLOMBO 1470

[C](#). COLOMBO 1427

Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) After the Government of the Republic of Maldives (GORM) turned down requests by an EU delegation for meetings with President Gayoom and prisoners detained after the demonstrations of August 12-13 (Ref B), EU Heads of Mission issued a stinging press release on September 8, decrying the prolonged detentions and continued State of Emergency as a "disproportionate reaction." Not to be outdone, the GORM issued a retaliatory press release on September 9, charging that the EU statement was "not factual" and questioning the basis of EU concern in Maldives' "difficulties." EU Missions in Colombo, especially the Dutch Embassy, intend to keep pressing the issue. Although one Maldivian contact reported that conditions had improved recently for the more prominent detainees, the protracted detentions of so many key champions of reform continue to raise questions about GORM commitment to democratic change. End summary.

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NO PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT;  
JUST FEISTY FOREIGN MINISTER FOR EU DELEGATES  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) An EU Chiefs of Mission delegation that traveled to the Maldivian capital of Male' on September 6 to discuss the State of Emergency and the continued detention of at least 11 MPs was not granted a request to meet with President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The delegation's request to meet with detained Members of the Special and Regular Majlis was similarly spurned. The delegation, composed of the Dutch Ambassador (representing the EU presidency), British Charge and a representative from the EU Mission in New Delhi, was following up on findings from an earlier, lower-level EU delegation that traveled to the atoll August 23 (Ref C).

[1](#)3. (C) Instead of the President, the EU delegation met with Foreign Minister Fathulla Jameel, whom UK Charge Peter Hughes described as "spectacularly belligerent." According to Hughes, the irate FM subjected the delegation to an eighty-minute tirade in which he questioned, among other things, the diplomats' right to request a meeting with the President and the EU's right to question Maldivian internal affairs. Attempts by the delegation to defuse the outburst, read out a prepared demarche and lead the discussion back to the purpose of the visit proved fruitless, Hughes said. Unable to meet either the President or the detainees, the delegation returned to Colombo the same evening.

[1](#)4. (C) Gayoom contacted the Dutch Ambassador by telephone in Colombo later the same evening, Hughes reported. The President (somewhat disingenuously) expressed surprise at the delegation's early return to Colombo, claiming that their inability to meet him was the result of a miscommunication, rather than a calculated stiff. (Note: Hughes agreed that this scenario seemed unlikely. The small size of the Government of the Republic of Maldives (GORM) and the President's firm grip on its operations generally minimize possibilities for "miscommunication." That said, the Foreign Minister is known to be a hard liner, and it can't be ruled out that he kept the EU visit from Gayoom since, according to many, Gayoom remains committed to some sort of reform process. End note.) According to Hughes, Gayoom told the Ambassador that he would have been glad to meet the delegation and reiterated his continued commitment--the prolonged detention of pro-reform activists notwithstanding--to democratic reform. On September 9 the state-owned website ran a cheery banner headline proclaiming "Gayoom briefs EU presidency on recent political developments." Further down the text of the article notes, in more modest print, that the briefing took place by telephone.

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15. (SBU) EU Chiefs of Mission, apparently unpersuaded by Gayoom's blandishments, on September 8 issued an uncharacteristically sharp press statement, criticizing the State of Emergency and "subsequent mass arrests" as "a disproportionate reaction by the Maldivian authorities to what was a largely peaceful demonstration." The statement called on the GORM to continue the still-incipient process of democratic reform and urged the early conclusion of the proposed agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross (Ref C). The final sentence of the release listed the names of the detained MPs to whom the delegation was not granted access.

16. (U) The GORM responded with its own press release (sent under cover of diplomatic note to Colombo-based Missions) on September 9. The GORM statement justified the declaration of the State of Emergency as having been "taken in the interest of public safety and national security in the face of threats of bombs and arson made by anonymous entities." The GORM statement disputed the EU's charge that "mass arrests" had taken place, noting that only 78 individuals remain in custody. The demonstrations on August 12 and 13 "were aimed at disrupting and derailing the (reform) process," the statement asserted. Among those hoping to derail the process, according to the statement, are "Islamic extremists" and "dissident groups" who hope to "blame the Government for failure to realize the reforms envisaged by the President and the people. . . . Among the people who were arrested by the Government, none of them is a 'reform leader.'" While not responding directly to the EU charge that the September 6 delegation was refused access to detained MPs, the GORM statement notes that the earlier delegation did meet the detainees and that thus "the statements made in the (EU) declaration are not factual" and do not take into account the GORM's genuine efforts to address the "difficulties" arising from the demonstrations. The final line of the GORM statement asserts, "Clearly, these difficulties are of greater concern to the Government of Maldives than to the EU."

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NEXT STEPS?  
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17. (C) UK Charge Hughes said that while the EU intends to maintain pressure on the GORM, no follow-up delegations, high-level phone calls, press statements or revised travel announcements are being contemplated in the near term. (Note: A possible phone call from British Deputy Prime Minister Prescott to Gayoom, which was once under active consideration, seems to have been placed on the back burner for now. Prescott may see Gayoom if the Maldivian leader visits London in September. End note.) The EU's most effective source of leverage, Hughes believes, may be its disproportionate share of the tourism market. (Note: EU countries account for nearly 70 percent of international tourists to Maldives. Tourism is the single greatest contributor to GDP in Maldives. End note.) Even though the EU is not considering officially discouraging travel to Maldives, Hughes said, unfavorable publicity, especially from human rights groups, might affect demand. Dutch DCM Harry van Dijk opined that the GORM is digging in its heels in the hope that international attention will eventually wane, leaving the GORM free to ignore pressure to reform. His Embassy, however, plans to continue to follow events closely.

18. (C) Hughes related to DCM several theories from pro-reform sources on why the GORM persists in holding the MPs. Some believe that the GORM's investigations into the MPs' purported connection to the demonstrations will turn up "evidence" of some criminal act that will render them ineligible to remain as MPs--and thus unable to continue to push for reforms. Others have suggested that the GORM may call snap elections while the MPs are in detention, making it impossible for them to contest, and leaving the GORM in full control of "guiding" the reform process. While noting the difficulty of determining the credibility of such theories, Hughes expressed general concern regarding the fate of the MPs in detention, speculating that the longer they remain in jail the more compelling the need for the GORM to find--or manufacture--some justification for holding them.

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FAMILY VISITS FOR MPS;  
OTHERS INCOMMUNICADO  
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19. (C) On September 10 the personal secretary to one of the detained MPs told poloff that conditions had improved for the better-known detainees, including the MPs, who are now being allowed contact with family members. He noted, however, that approximately 50 detainees (believed to held at a separate facility on another island) have not been visited or heard

from by anyone. He urged other diplomatic visitors, including any from the U.S. Embassy, to request a meeting with at least some of these detainees.

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COMMENT  
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110. (C) The GORM is not used to international scrutiny and criticism and, as evidenced by the Foreign Minister's tirade and the shrilly indignant press statement, does not react well to it. With 11 of the most vocal proponents of reform in government custody, the claim in the GORM press release that none of the detainees is a reform leader is, in the words that the GORM used to deride the EU statement, "not factual." Whatever the GORM's reasons for holding the MPs, the prolonged detentions of more than 10 percent of the Members of the Special Majlis--which was set up for the sole purpose of recommending constitutional reforms--does not suggest progress toward greater democratization is imminent. Impending visits by the DCM (September 19-20) and the Ambassador (end of September/beginning of October) will provide opportunities for us to remind Male' of USG interest in continued reform and concern at recent developments.

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